

A New Way of Living: Put it into Practice

Big Idea: We must practice being gospel citizens.

Purpose: To equip people for living into gospel realities in the midst of their daily lives.

Passage: Philippians 4:1-14

Verse: Philippians 4:9

Overview: Every day we have countless opportunities to choose if we will live in light of the gospel. Every day we have countless opportunities to PRACTICE this new way of living. How can we better recognize these opportunities and enjoy the promise of God's presence and peace?

Intro

The year before my 30th birthday, I decided to make a list of 30 things I wanted to do before I was thirty. Things like:

1. Go to a new national park
2. Volunteer somewhere new
3. Make a beautiful cake

I think I ended up doing 20 something of the 30 things within that one-year time frame. Not bad. One of those things that I did NOT do was learn a song on the piano. My sisters and I took piano lessons growing up. They were older than me and could play really cool songs like "A Whole New World" from *Aladdin* and "My Heart Will Go On" from *Titanic*, but I couldn't. I stopped lessons in early elementary school, but have still always wanted to play that dang Titanic song.

So, in January this year, I renewed my commitment to learn the piano. I signed up for weekly lessons and it's been like the most fun thing of the year thus far. After I drove away from my first lesson, I literally started full on, OUT LOUD giggling in the car. I think that means something =^)

One of the things piano is teaching me is that when I practice, I make progress. When I don't, I don't. It's very clear that way. My teacher is superforgiving and chill about such things, but I love the feeling of getting

better and actually making noise that sounds like music, so I'm motivated to keep going.

After the first few lessons, I started to move from one hand at a time, to two hands at a time. It felt like patting my head and rubbing my tummy. I was REALLY stuck. I literally COULD NOT get my left hand to play this slower group of notes while my right hand played a different group notes at a quicker pace. I willed my brain to focus, but every time my hands just couldn't do it! It was hilarious. My body had no muscle memory for what I was asking it to do.

As any good piano teacher would do, my teacher broke it down note by note, and gave me a few exercises that would get my hand muscles used to that kind of movement. After a bit of practice, I could do it! It's completely and utterly satisfying to so clearly see the progression of NOT being able to do something to being able to do it!

There are new challenges every week as I continue to practice this new instrument, but I'm seeing progress, and it's totally fun and motivating. Maybe you'll see me in the band one of these weeks =^)

Overview

Today we're concluding our teaching series on Philippians. Over the past 5 weeks, we've explored aspects of "the new way of living" the apostle Paul is encouraging the Philippians to live out. They, too, were learning a new instrument of sorts. They were called to make a new kind of music with their lives and it was going to take practice.

First, we looked at how the gospel shifts our mindset. The Philippians needed to practice seeing themselves, others, and their circumstances from God's perspective: ***in Christ***. Even though things look grim—as they did to the Philippians—***the gospel is unstoppable***. God will repurpose every heartache and every pain for our good.

Another big theme we saw was ***humility***. On the cross, Jesus showed us that the way to go high is actually to ***go low*** through self-giving love. We explored

what obedience means—how it can be a tricky word, but when the one we are looking to is worthy, obedience can become a **joyful surrender**. And last week, Dr. Nijay Gupta shared with us what it looks like to become **a friend of the Cross**. The Cross of Christ invites us once again to look at life from God’s perspective—what are we chasing after and what really matters?

Whew, it’s been a pretty power-packed few weeks, right? Today we’re looking at chapter 4, the last chapter in Philippians. You can go ahead and turn or scroll there in your Bibles. As Paul closes his letter, we’ll see how he urges the Philippians to take everything he’s been talking about and to put it into practice.

Passage

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content

whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. —Philippians 4:1-13

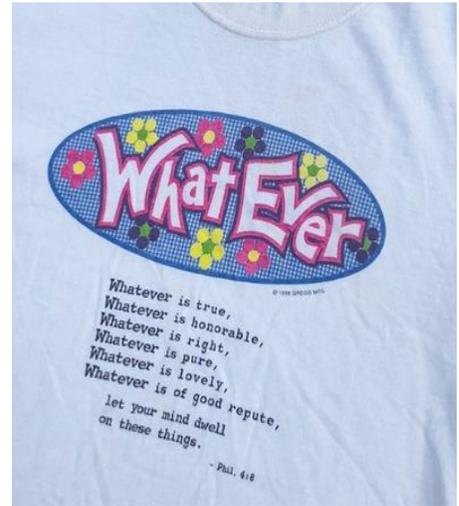
Commentary

First of all, how would you like it if your pastor called you out by name in the middle of a sermon, using you as an example of the point she was making? Mmhmm, I gotta imagine that Euodia and Syntyche were feeling a bit exposed. Paul's reason for addressing them in this letter would have been for the sake of unity for the whole body of believers, so we can imagine these women played prominent and influential roles in the church. What I love is that **Paul holds space for this amazing paradox: He identifies some problematic things he sees in their behavior, AND he still calls these women beloved, dear friends, co-workers in the gospel, and held by God (written in God's book of life).** He doesn't pick sides or give specific guidance on how to reconcile, but he urges the church as a whole to see the bigger vision at stake: **unity in the gospel mission.**

Paul then moves on to another pastoral moment. The Philippians were facing some less than ideal circumstances. As we've explored throughout this series, the Philippians were being persecuted; mocked by their neighbors because of their new ways of living. Their leader was in prison. In a very real sense, it didn't seem like things were going well. And yet, once again, **Paul invites them into a paradox: "Yes, you are experiencing reasons to be stressed out, afraid, and overwhelmed AND I'm telling you to celebrate, to pray, to trust that God is at work beyond what you can see. Turn that anxious energy into faith. The Lord is near."** God hasn't forgotten about the Philippians. The Lord is near. He sees and He cares. Paul is encouraging them to rest in that.

Verse 8: *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

How many of you are familiar with this passage? Whenever I hear or read it I'm instantly taken back to the house I grew up in. I can see my sister walking out of her room into the hallway wearing this early 90s, graphic t-shirt with Philippians 4:8 printed on it in mixed-matched fonts and colors. I think we've got a pic of that.



To be honest, the message of that text has also been imprinted in my memory like that t-shirt: a nice idea, good for a memory verse or an 8th grade t-shirt, but not really applicable to real life. Anyone with me? I wish I could see you here nodding your heads!

Well, the beautiful thing about sermon writing is that it sorta forces you to think more deeply about texts that have become easy to dismiss as trite or “nice ideas”. The past few weeks I’ve been captivated by the invitation here. **Every day, there is a God-reality of goodness, truth, substance, and beauty that we always have access to—even as we are so often tempted to skim the surface of our lives.** Part of being gospel citizens is to step daily into that God-reality, so we can see God’s light and goodness all around us. It’s there, but **we must actively seek it and pray for eyes to see it.**

Paul is quick to say that **this new way of living takes practice.** It’s not something that just happens. It would be pretty remarkable if I could just sit down at the piano and decide: *today, I can play the piano.* No wonder we get frustrated with ourselves in our inability to just *BE* the faithful and whole person we want to be. It’s actually quite silly, isn’t it, to have those expectations of ourselves and others? Instead, Paul tells us to PRACTICE. **There are actual things we can do to practice our way into this new way of living. We’re going to look at a few of those things today and even make some space to practice them together.**

Rest in Christ’s Care

First, as gospel citizens, we practice this new way of living by resting in Christ’s care.

From prison, Paul writes, *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.* —Philippians 4:12-13

Wow. “*I have learned the secret of being content.*” That’s a bit of a claim, isn’t it? Sometimes I just rush over what I’m reading and don’t let the weight of it sink in. How do these words land with you? Are they encouraging? Hopeful? Maybe, like me, you’re thinking, “Dang, I’m not there yet.”

Notice Paul’s language: I have LEARNED. Contentment didn’t just happen in Paul’s life. He LEARNED it, he practiced it over time. For Paul, the key to this contentment was the assurance of Christ’s care.

Paul’s so convinced of God’s presence and care in Christ that he calls the Philippians to rejoice! To celebrate! He encourages them:

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4:6-7

We see this as a recurring theme of scripture—later in the New Testament, the apostle Peter writes: *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.* .
— 1 Peter 5:7

Since my senior year of college, I have navigated anxiety. There are seasons where it’s extreme and seasons where it’s manageable. For people who deal with anxiety in a chronic way, reading “do not be anxious” can feel a bit telling someone with diabetes to produce more insulin. It’s like, “Yeah, thanks for the tip!” Paul isn’t addressing anxiety disorders in this passage. People who regularly struggle with anxiety may need to be more diligent, creating a care plan and support network as we seek to live well with our condition, just like those with other chronic health issues. But **the deeper invitation of this text is not just to “stop being anxious,” but rather, to practice resting in Christ’s care.**

I remember one particular day standing in my parent's driveway and talking to my dad. I was **worked up** about something. My brain was spinning with "what if" questions and my image of God was tangled up in fear. My worry felt so, so, deep, so urgent, so true. My dad calls this lovely quality of mine *being caught on the hamster wheel*.

He asked me something that day that has been a game changer for me as I've sought to practice this new way of living: resting in Christ's care:

He said, "Hannah, do you believe that God cares about this? I'm your dad, and if you were to share something with me that was so precious to you, so important to you, don't you think I would hold that with great care? And I'm just a guy. How much more with God?"

Do I believe God cares about this? What would change if I did?

What worries are clamoring for your attention today? What anxieties have you caught on the hamster wheel? Do you believe that God cares about that? What would change if you did?

The whole theme of this message is to *PUT IT INTO PRACTICE*. Rather than just talk about this new way of living, we have kind of a cool opportunity, being online, to actually practice some of this together.

You're going to have a moment to reflect with God on that question.

What worry is your heart carrying today?

Ask yourself, *Do I believe God cares about this?*

What would change if I did?

We're going to end this practice with one of my most favorite prayers:

God, thank You that I can trust You with this.

I invite you to pray that out loud now. "*God, thank You that I can trust You with _____.*" (you fill in the blank). God, thank You that we can trust You with all of our cares.

As gospel citizens, we put into practice this new way of living by resting in Christ's care.

Account For The Best in One Another

Next, as gospel citizens, we must account for the best in one another.

In verse 8, the phrase to “think about” is an accounting word in the Greek.

It means to take into account, to reckon, to calculate. We are urged in this passage to actively see and consider the good, the true, the beautiful in everything, everyone. Throughout this series we've been talking about how the way we see impacts the way we think and the way we think impacts the way we live. It's all connected.

Several years ago I had the opportunity to do a 10 day backpack trip around Mt. Rainier on a route called the Wonderland Trail. There were 4 of us on the trip—my longtime friend Beth (this was her first backpacking trip), Sara, a dear friend from college, and Tim, Sara's boyfriend. This was Sara and Tim's “*Are we going to get engaged?*” trip. No pressure. (They ARE married now and live in Nashville).

Sara and I are both leader types and we're both strategic thinkers. Every backpacker has their own little hacks and ways of doing things, and that is especially true of Sara and me.

About half-way into the trip—after a few nights of rain and a few days of some long uphill sections—a bit of a power struggle started to emerge between us. I don't remember exactly what pushed things over the edge for us, but I think it had something to do with who was going to pump water when we got into camp. I remember journaling that night—*How were we going to get through this? We were both feeling frustrated, hurt, and hiding behind our respective walls. How were we going to find our way back to one another?* Disconnection is miserable, isn't it?

The next morning, after some alone time, Sara came and found me and handed me a little note. My heart started beating fast. *What was she going to*

say? After she walked away, I opened the note to find a list of things that Sara loved about me and valued about our friendship. Her words of love pierced through my self-protective armor and dissolved the wall I had erected between us. Once the armor was off, we were able to have a conversation about what was really going on in our power struggle and how to work better together as a team. In her note, **Sara was accounting for the best in us; accounting for the best in me.**

Underneath all the mess, there is a beautiful world that God made and that God is working to restore and redeem in Christ. I really believe that this is the heart of the gospel. As gospel citizens, that gets to be our work, too! Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, but to heal it, save it, to bring out the best in it, restore it. On the cross, when Jesus had every reason and every right to see the worst in humanity, do you know what He did? He prayed. "Forgive them, Father. They know not what they do." Even in our worst, Jesus accounts for our best.

We see a bit of this getting played out in verses 2-3. Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to behold one another in Christ—as sisters, as beloved of God and co-workers in the gospel. He asks the community to support them, because sometimes, we need help with this. We need others to help us see more clearly what we can't see when we are hurt, suspicious, or afraid.

Please hear me New Hope: **We must be *for* each other.** We are created in the image of God—sisters and brothers in God's human family. Our fight is not against flesh and blood. Our real enemy wins if we start to fight AGAINST one another rather than fight FOR one another. I think this is so critical as we are physically distanced because, with distance, it's easier to become less real to one another. It's easier to let our narratives of fear and hurt and suspicion get the better of us. It's easier to write one another off or believe the worst. **We must practice accounting for the best.**

Now, as gospel citizens, we are not urged to keep fighting for relationships that are unhealthy, toxic, or abusive. **Boundaries and justice are a part of grace, but bitterness and judgement will erode our hearts.** We can behold someone with grace-healed eyes and still have very firm boundaries with them. If you are rumbling with the work of forgiveness right now (which is

essentially what I'm talking about), I encourage you to visit the teaching page on our website (newhopepdx.org/teaching) and listen to the series on forgiveness from a few years back. It's all about what this life of grace is and isn't as it relates to relationships.

Who are you struggling to love today? Who do you find yourself ruminating about, having conversations with in your head? Grab a sticky note, or the notes app on your phone, and make a list. Account for the good, the true, and the beautiful in them. To be honest, sometimes that practice can even feel like too much, too inaccessible for where I am.

Another practice I've found super helpful is this simple prayer: "*Sister so & so, beloved of God. Brother so & so, beloved of God.*" As I pray these truths, they come nearer and nearer, and my heart starts to untangle a bit from the ways it's gotten tied up with comparison, jealousy, anger, suspicion, and pride. I find myself able to receive the peace and presence of God in fresh, new ways.

Once again, we have the opportunity to practice this way of gospel living right now. I'm going to give you another moment to invite God to bring to mind someone you are struggling to love or to behold in grace. **Take these few seconds to make a list of the good, the true, and the beautiful in that person.** Or, if that's too much for where you are right now, practice bringing that person to mind and pray this simple prayer:

Brother _____, beloved of God.

Sister _____, beloved of God.

As gospel citizens, we must account for the best in each other. We must put into practice seeing others, ourselves, and our circumstances as Jesus sees.

Closing

This new way of living doesn't happen overnight. Even as I wrote this message I was so aware of how often I fail to live in a way that matches the truths I believe. I can get overwhelmed and get into this awful cycle of *Try-harder! Give up. Try harder! Give up.* Anyone with me?

The other day I found myself in one of those cycles. I decided to go for a walk up on Mt. Tabor. Partway through the walk, I had this image of a stationary bike come to mind. I sensed God's Spirit saying, "Hey Hannah, get off the *try harder* bike, and walk forward in grace."

We are accepted and loved just as we are. But God does want our flourishing and He knows the way. It's a way of practice, and a way of grace. His grace is sufficient for us and His power is made perfect in our weakness.

It's in this very place of becoming, where we are still in process, that God can do God's best work. It's in this place of *becoming* that we can sit down at the piano, once again, show up in our lives today once again, look to Jesus, and say, "Hey, You know the way. Show me what I can practice today."